

“The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust and be not intent only on your own ease.”

The quote is to emphasize weight of the issues at hand. I thank the Members of the Appropriations committee for hearing me.

My Name is Will Brady.

I am a case manager at a homeless shelter in Middletown managed by Columbus House a New Haven t based non-profit, and while I share the perspectives that drive that organization I speak today, as a private citizen who has worked for decades with and on behalf of people who are homeless as well as those with psychiatric disabilities.

I am here to endorse matters before the legislature as part of HB 5037 (AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023)

- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance request to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, (including housing and homeless service organization) funds that can bring us closer to getting funds promised to community services by Governor Rowland in the 1990s.
- I support including 13.34 million in FY 23 for homeless and housing services funding for livable wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers
- I support adding \$2.3 million to DOH’s Homeless Services for critical support to Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 2-1-1. CANs to improve access to the homeless services system
- Increase DMHAS Housing Supports to expand supportive services to help minimize housing insecurity and create 300 new housing units
- to create an eviction prevention initiative to help protect vulnerable renters.

I support all these to begin to better help address very real challenges faced by people whose lack of places to stay or whose housing is insecure, at best, .

Becoming homeless can happen to any of us.

People who’ve become homeless include mothers, dads, children, elders without families. They include those who lived with frail relatives who died and now lack the resources to fend for themselves. They are adults with disabilities whose families long ago passed on or abandoned them., They include people who have always struggled as well as those who were once well off but who have now lost everything.

Losing housing comes in many ways: a fire destroying an apartment complex; unforeseen medical costs, unexpected hikes in rents, fleeing from domestic violence, loss of employment and other economic uncertainties.

Unhoused people are forced to sleep in places not meant for human habitation – under tarps in the woods, in cars or hiding in the hallways of buildings – with no respite in sight, often due to troublesome, and oft insidious reasons.

Once homeless, people lose their possessions, identification, cell phones and connection to resources and everything else then becomes impossible.

People who, as the British say, are forced to “live rough” are also at greater risk of medical problems going untreated (from basic health care, dental and eye care, mental health aid/treatment, to dialysis and cancer treatments) resulting in additional reliance on Emergency rooms and crisis intervention.

To get reestablished – without a phone – without IDs – is to be subject to a dizzying array of agencies and costs to try to get them back. Yet without ID, you can’t even get a pre-paid limited speaking time telephone.

Entering the shelter system comes with even more obstacles.

The state does have a coordinated shelter program (211 CAN), but its staff are often overwhelmed with calls for help, as they try to get folks into shelter programs that exist.

And calling in isn’t easy. Someone needing shelter, may remain on hold for as long as two hours before speaking with someone and sent to a shelter bed. I know because I’ve sat with folks who’ve waited this long). If the caller has a phone with limited talk minutes per month – that two-hour wait has used up half their monthly minutes. I implore all of you hearing this to call 211 to find out for yourself how long it can take.

That said, the 211 CAN services, even flawed, are vital. They connect people to shelters and programs that can help address great needs, needs that are far greater than the resources can meet, especially in storms or winter weather.

I support initiatives that service providers have raised to reduce or eradicating homelessness

I also ask that funds be made available for other needs:

- make it easier for homeless people rejoin the workforce:
- for funds help cover the costs of replacing identification
- for access to bus and transport passes to travel without walking everywhere
- Heck, provide back packs and sturdy travel bags to keep clothes and important documents in.
- But, by all means, provide funds for more DOH and DMHAS housing, to improve/augment 211CAN resources, to enact eviction prevention protection, for up to date tech resources as well for as livable wages for front line workers to continue the efforts to help.

Connecticut is one of the wealthiest states in the nation, perhaps in the world. Our failure to provide the resources to help end homelessness is shameful.

I beseech our legislators to be leaders, to guide and shepherd disenfranchised people from a precarious existence to being able to once again be part of our larger society so that all may benefit because our leaders have truly begun to address the challenge of eradicating homelessness, by now putting forth the resources to make that possible.

I invite you to contact me and continue the dialogue. Thank you for your time to hear those of us working to help restore some order into people’s lives.

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